

## *Psychological Handicaps, II*

By Marguerite Higgins

WASHINGTON.

SENATOR FULBRIGHT, for all his courageous battle on behalf of foreign aid, is being regarded with increasing dismay by the Kennedy administration as a specialist in saying the wrong thing, at the wrong place, at the worst possible time.

The chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee made his latest contribution to the department of utter confusion at a London press conference. According to an Associated Press dispatch carrying the headline "Fulbright Says West Shares Berlin Blame," the Senator is quoted as saying: "We bear heavy responsibilities for the stupidities of this situation, which is to my shame, as it is to anyone in the West. Certainly it was not just the fault of the Russians. The Americans contributed much to this. I do not know how much the British and others contributed. I do not want to be self-righteous about it."

Coming at a time of a lamentable—and basically unwarranted—crisis of confidence among Germans and many Europeans in Washington's will to defend the West's freedom and America's honor in Berlin, Sen. Fulbright's statement delivered a double psychological whammy. It tends to diminish the degree of right on our side and therefore contributes, however unwittingly, to the demoralizing question: is the situation in Berlin really worth defending?

As regards the present Berlin crisis, the Senator appears (and even Senators must realize how much even a vague first impression counts) to be in direct contradiction to the Kennedy administration's position.

President Kennedy's stand is that the Communists are indeed solely to blame in Berlin because there would be no crisis if the Russians were not seeking unilaterally to give away to their East German puppets something that is not Russia's to give: namely, control over the freedom of West Berlin.

In this matter of saying the wrong thing at the wrong time, Sen. Fulbright has been batting a thousand, with his record unspoiled so far as each major international crisis faced by the Kennedy administration since Jan. 20 is concerned.

Thus several weeks before the East Germans erected their Chinese Wall in mid-Berlin, Sen. Fulbright said in a television interview that a closing down of the refugee escape hatch from East Berlin to West Berlin "might be negotiable." The Senator later said he was misinterpreted. But alas, the first impression (and the impression that persists today among Berliners) is that certain circles in Washington were embarrassed by the volume of freedom-seeking refugees. Many free Berliners, including Mayor Willy Brandt, believe that the impression created by Fulbright helped to develop an atmosphere in which the Communists persuaded themselves that they could erect their Chinese Wall in mid-Berlin without serious repercussions from the West.

On a recent visit to Berlin, this correspondent was even told by a Communist diplomat that the West was "secretly relieved" that the refugee problem had been "solved," and documented his case with quotations from the Fulbright interview.

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Sen. Fulbright has not restricted his utterances to Europe. In the case of Laos, the Senator's timing was equally exquisite. The period in question was late April and early May, those agonizing days when Washington was seeking to wrest a cease-fire from the Communist invaders of Laos. Indeed, everything depended on making the Russians believe that the U. S. was in fact ready to intervene unless the Communists called off their attacks.

Why else should the Communists desist from seizing the prize of Luang Prabang, Vientiane, and the whole Mekong River Valley which with a few more weeks of fighting might be in their hands? In fact, to emphasize the alternatives, President Kennedy staged an emergency series of National Security Council meetings—five in five days—with the press openly briefed that the topic was whether to intervene in Laos.

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